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Sweet and Sour: Ethnic Networks and Inequality in a Chinese Restaurant

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Sweet and Sour: Ethnic Networks and Inequality in a Chinese Restaurant

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Sweet and Sour: Ethnic Networks and Inequality in a Chinese Restaurant

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This study examines the experiences of Asian immigrants working in Asian restaurants to understand how ethnicity and race shapes their social interactions and social inequality inside their places of work. Using interviews with Asian immigrants working in Asian restaurants and three months of participant observation in a Chinese restaurant, I consider how immigrants working in an immigrant-owned business understand socioeconomic attainment, how social capital functions in ethnic networks, and how race, ethnicity, and gender shape workers' experiences in family owned restaurants. I argue that the success of Asian immigrant businesses is not a result of Asian culture; rather, Asian restaurant owners may exploit both co-ethnic and other racial-ethnic workers to benefit their own socioeconomic mobility. Ethnic network members provide support to each other in a project of "ethnic uplift" to gain socioeconomic mobility while differentiating their group from those deemed lower on the ethnic-racial hierarchy. Within ethnic networks, co-ethnic exploitation occurs when individuals

attempt to move up the socio-economic ladder in a solitary project of racial and socioeconomic uplift.

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Introduction

Asian immigrant businesses are often cast as symbols of self-made success based on hard work and entrepreneurial drive. Many sociologists have conducted studies on immigrant-owned and employed businesses, focusing on the role of social capital and social networks in immigrant socioeconomic attainment (Lancee 2012, Levitt 2002, Raijman & Tienda 2003, Valdez 2008, Light, et al. 1994). Recent research, however, notes the negative effects of social networks and the vulnerabilities of working in ethnic businesses (Hoang 2015, Rosales 2014, Anthias 2007, Avenarius 2012, Cranford 2005, Ryan 2011, Song 1997). Recent press on immigrant-owned nail salons reveal the inequalities in immigrant owned businesses including exploitative labor practices, astonishingly low wages, hazardous working conditions, and racial and ethnic discrimination (Nir 2015). Such evidence points to the importance of examining inequality in immigrant-owned and employed businesses.

This study investigates inequality in family-owned Asian restaurants in Austin, Texas. My investigation is guided by the following questions: How do immigrants working in an immigrant-owned business understand socioeconomic attainment? How does social capital function in ethnic networks? (How) does race, ethnicity, and gender shape workers' experiences in family owned restaurants?

The implications of this research goes well beyond the context of family-owned Asian restaurants. I used this specific context as an opportunity to explore larger sociological themes that can advance theory on race, immigration, and inequality. Finding

out the mechanisms of inequality in family-owned Asian restaurants is an important enterprise given that immigrants doing low-wage work are already marginalized. This study extends theory by demonstrating how labor and networks are seeped with meanings about race, ethnicity, and gender that reinforce broader structures of inequality. Understanding inequality in family-owned Asian businesses is important in deconstructing the "model minority" myth. By linking theory on racialization to observational and interview data, this study demonstrates that the success of Asian immigrant businesses is not a result of Asian culture; rather, Asian restaurant owners may exploit both co-ethnic and other racial-ethnic workers to benefit their own socioeconomic mobility.

First, I reveal how after immigrating and finding work at an Asian family owned restaurant, immigrant workers' expectations of settlement and work are often unmet. Next, I show how ethnic network members do not uniformly assist or exploit co-ethnics. Instead, unwritten rules of obligations in ethnic networks aid in the socioeconomic attainment of some individuals, while making others vulnerable. Third, I demonstrate how labor practices in Asian American owned businesses, which discriminate differentially against Asian and Latino immigrants, which then reveals how racial hierarchies are maintained on an everyday basis. Ultimately, I argue that ethnic networks exist within contemporary racial formations. Ethnic network members provide support to each other in a project of "ethnic uplift" to gain socioeconomic mobility while differentiating their group from those deemed lower on the ethnic-racial hierarchy. Within ethnic networks, co-ethnic exploitation occurs when individuals attempt to move up the socio-economic ladder in a solitary project of racial and socioeconomic uplift. The powerful narrative of Asians as a model minority simplifies and obfuscates the challenges and constraints in immigrant-owned businesses and the within-group inequalities that ethnic organizations can fuel.

Background

Asian Immigrants and Socioeconomic Attainment

Theories of assimilation argue that as immigrants became more like the white middle-class Americans, they would lose characteristics that made them distinctly "ethnic." According to classical assimilation theory, spatial and physical distance is correlated with social distance, meaning that as immigrants move away from ethnic enclaves and adopt the culture of white middle-class Americans, they will become increasingly upwardly mobile. Scholars have recognized the flaws with assimilation theory and such literature is thought to be outdated. Underlying classical assimilation theory is the ideology that middle-class whites are the standard to which other groups are assessed and to which they should aspire. It also posits the inevitability of assimilation and suggests the inevitability of racial justice. Structural racism and hostility of mainstream society towards immigrants and ethnic-racial minorities may lead immigrants to look to ethnic communities to live and find work. Classical assimilation theory does not recognize the benefits of insular ethnic communities.

Another theoretical approach suggests that ethnic communities are an alternate method of incorporation into American society, while simultaneously allowing individuals to maintain cultural/ethnic distinctiveness (Zhou 1992). Min Zhou (1992) argues that ethnic communities help to incorporate new immigrants and racial-ethnic minorities into society while shielding them from the racial hostility of American society (Zhou 1992).

While immigrant adaptation is no longer conceptualized by scholars only in terms of cultural assimilation, it is often conceptualized in socioeconomic terms (Park 2005). Sociologists look to see which immigrants succeed the most and how they are able to do this. The association between Asian immigrants and socioeconomic success is particularly strong (Park 2005). In fact, many immigrants perceive that certain aspects of their culture are peculiarly suited for assimilation, and they attempt to reinforce these aspects of their culture (Rudrappa 2004). Park suggests that "given the deep connections between immigrant entrepreneurs and Asian Americans as the 'model minority,' these businesses and the Asian immigrants who run them often serve to symbolize an open society without a rigid class or race-based structure in which poor, uneducated immigrants with nothing but their determination and 'family values' attain economic upward mobility and social acceptance in the United States" (Park 2005:3).

As Lisa Park (2005) notes, the uncritical celebration of Asian American socioeconomic success obscures problems facing workers in Asian family-owned businesses. An emerging literature suggest that expected lifestyle improvements are often never achieved by immigrants (Mahler 1995, Menjivar 2000, Cranford 2005). Ethnic networks and racial stratification produce socioeconomic stratification.

Using ethnographic and interview data, I examine how racial-ethnic stratification and networks are linked to the socioeconomic attainment of Asian immigrants who own and work in those businesses. This research illuminates the processes of stratification among those working in immigrant-owned Asian restaurants that may aid in the socioeconomic attainment of some Asian immigrants. I focus on (1) how immigrants

working in Asian immigrant businesses make sense and meaning of their settlement including aspects of their family and work lives, (2) how ethnic networks can provide material supports to ethnic network members while also creating constraints and tensions among members, and (3) how ethnic groups exploit other racial-ethnic groups in order to get ahead.

Constraints in Ethnic Networks

Immigrants often rely on social networks to immigrate to the United States. Research shows the importance of ethnic networks before, during, and after migration in the process of migration and settlement (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pedraza 1991; Massey et al. 1993). Ethnic networks provide social support for new immigrants by circulating information and assistance (Portes 1998, Portes and Rumbaut 2001) Ethnic networks influence incorporation by assisting with housing, employment, and loans (Hagan 1994; Baily and Waldinger 1991; Bashi 2007).

Portes and Bach (1985) suggest that migrants tend to concentrate in ethnic clusters, including ethnic enclaves and ethnic economies due to the economic and social benefits resulting from ethnic networks. Ethnic economies tend to be businesses run by people of color, which rely on solely family labor, or tend to employ co-ethnics (Bonancich and Modell 1980). These sorts of spaces are deemed favorable for newcomers because immigrants can use their native language. Waldinger and Lichter (2003) suggest that ethnic networks created in ethnic businesses widen workers' contacts, improve chances for moving through different jobs, and obtaining more skills. When

migrants do not have interaction or ties with co-ethnic immigrant communities, they may use global and local recruitment agencies to seek employment in ethnic economies (Batnitzky & McDowell 2013).

In the social capital literature, networks are resources for getting ahead. While it is true in general that social networks provide resources for socioeconomic mobility, the patterns masks many disadvantages that can chip away at those advantages. The degree of social and economic support in ethnic networks and ethnic economies is debated (Wahlbeck 2007). Alba and Nee (1987) argue that there are limits to ethnic solidarity and the success of ethnic businesses depends on a large pool of exploited laborers. Sanders and Sernau (1994) find that ethnic minorities prefer to work outside of the ethnic economy to obtain higher wages and fairer work rules. Recent scholars suggest that the concept of "social capital" should be confined to actualization of resources and that social networks should be contextualized in terms of actors' gender and socioeconomic status, for example (Bashi 2007, Cranford 2005; Anthias 2007; Ryan 2011).

Patricia Pessar (2003) argues that existing scholarship on immigration needs to be linked to gender. Gendered processes and networks shape immigrant settlement and how they think and feel about immigration and settlement. Research shows that immigrant women and men have different outcomes regarding ethnic networks. For example, Nazli Kibria (1993) found that Vietnamese immigrant women were often able to overcome social isolation and become more influential than men through forming ties with non-Vietnamese individuals. Menjivar (2000) found that Salvadoran women were often in charge of seeking assistance from community organizations, which allowed them to

expand their networks with other immigrant women and non-immigrant women who ran the organizations.

In Houston, for example, Jacqueline Hagan (1998) found that Mayan immigrants' weak ties with non-immigrants gave them access to information that helped to facilitate their integration into the city. Conversely, Mayan immigrant women's domestic employment and residence in isolated suburbs meant that their strong ties with non-immigrants offered them little information outside their immediate circles. The outcomes for immigrant men and women in ethnic economies also differs (Schrover et al. 2007, Delallfar 1994). Research shows that women receive fewer benefits than their male co-ethnics (Portes and Jensen 1989, Zhou and Logan 1989, Gilbertson 1995). Saskia Sassen (1995) finds that working with relatives is associated with higher wages among men, but lower wages among women. Anthias and Mehta (2003) found that while men could call on family as resources for their business, women could not. These studies challenge the assumption that ethnic networks result in benefits. Non-ethnic ties may be more important; and gender critically shapes immigrants' economic outcomes.

Menjivar (2000) notes that ethnic ties that were once helpful may later not be of assistance and sometimes may be riddled with conflict. Poverty makes it difficult for immigrants to help their friends and families (Menjivar 2000). Immigrants' employers pressed to produce a surplus may take advantage of less seasoned co-ethnics (Mahler 1995). In a study of Latina domestic workers, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) finds that veteran Latina domestic workers may exploit the novices that they mentor, paying them little or nothing. Cynthia Cranford (2005) finds that by recruiting through social

networks, immigrant employers have better surveillance and control co-ethnic workers. Immigrant business-owners may invite migrants to immigrate and work with the expectation that they will do so for little pay (Rosales 2014). In their analysis of immigrant Korean entrepreneurs in Los Angeles, Light and Bonacich (1991) view immigrant small businesses as places of "incredible exploitation." They found that 75 percent of Korean businesses employ no wage labor and require a willingness on the part of family members to work long hours for low wages. Jones and Ram (2004) argue that Asian ethnic enclave businesses survive through the exploitation of captive co-ethnic labor force who are excluded from employment in the mainstream labor market. Bloch (2014) notes that ethnic networks may be the only available option for undocumented immigrants, even if there is minimal or no access to information or other benefits.

Bashi (2007) argues that "cultures of reciprocity," or the unwritten rules of obligation, gift-giving, and repayment, in ethnic networks may result in ethnic ties that are be riddled with gratitude *and* constraint. For example, Miri Song (1997) found that in the case of Chinese take-out food businesses in Britain, children were important to the viability of business. Children's commitment to 'helping out' was based on a sense of family obligation and Chinese cultural identity. Bashi (2007) suggests that "network hubs" offer assistance to new migrants based on the potential migrant having some characteristic that will enhance either the lifestyle or the reputation of the hub. Assistance from a network hub may shape new migrants' experience of racial hierarchies and socioeconomic mobility.

In sum, ethnic networks assist individuals in immigration and settlement; at the same time, however, racial-ethnic minorities may benefit from the marginalization of co-ethnics and family members. Thus, ethnic networks should be understood as having contradictory effects as marked by individuals' gender and socioeconomic status. The second objective of this study, therefore, is to look at social supports and constraints within ethnic networks. In doing so, I focus on obligations, gift-giving, and repayments within ethnic networks of those working in Asian immigrant businesses. I argue that while ethnic networks may provide social and financial assistance, the success of some Asian immigrant businesses may be built on the exploitation of those co-ethnic workers.

Ethnic Networks and Racial Hierarchies

The overall socioeconomic attainment of Asian Americans has marked them as a "model minority." A model minority is a minority group whose members are most often perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average. The term "model minority" was first used in print by sociologist William Peterson in an article titled "Success Story: Japanese American Style" published in the *New York Times Magazine* in January 1966. Peterson concluded that Japanese culture with its family values and strong work ethic enabled the Japanese Americans to overcome prejudice and to avoid becoming a "problem minority" (Wu 2013). A second article similarly describing Chinese Americans appeared in *U.S. News and World Report* on December 26, 1966 (Wu 2013). This label is often associated with cultural representations of Asian Americans as hard working and symbolic of a lack of need for

government action to reduce racial discrimination. Media discourse around immigrant adaptation and socioeconomic mobility is articulated in terms of cultural traits rather than race. Claire Jean Kim (1999) notes, "rather than asserting the intrinsic racial superiority of certain groups over others, opinion makers now claim that certain group cultures are more conducive to success than (read: superior to) Black cultural values" (Kim 1999:117). Kim argues that Asian Americans are racially triangulated on two axes, insider/foreigner and superior/inferior. Asians are cast as superior to Blacks but still foreigners. Thus, it is evident that groups exist in relation to other groups on racialized hierarchies. "Good" cultural traits may not only be associated with races, but also with certain ethnic groups. Richard Jenkins (1997) notes that even ethnic relations within the same race can become hierarchically organized. While ethnicity is not necessarily hierarchical, it exists within racial contexts, even ethnic group also become hierarchically organized.

According to Treitler (2013), the success of one racial-ethnic group is predicated on their ability to benefit from existing racial hierarchies initially designed to exclude other racial-ethnic groups from socioeconomic opportunities that whites have. Treilter (2013) implies that racial-ethnic hierarchies are maintained by racial-ethnic minorities, within ethnic groups *and* by individual persons of color. Treitler (2013) notes that one strategy of differentiation from supposed racial-ethnic inferiors is self-segregation in workplaces. Groups that succeed in a project of "ethnic uplift" "take the racial structure as a given and primarily work to change only their place in it" (Treitler 2013:5). In sum,

Treitler clearly states: “inequality among races and ethnicities is to some degree directly attributable to actors who struggle for higher ethno-racial status” (Treitler 2013:13).

The final objective of this study, therefore, is to look at racial stratification in immigrant businesses. In doing so, I describe stratified job positions and working conditions at a Chinese restaurant. I argue that because Asian immigrant businesses are created in the context of racial hierarchies, business owners incorporate racial hierarchies into their business strategy to advance socioeconomically. Ethnic network members provide support to each other in a project of “ethnic uplift” to gain socioeconomic mobility while differentiating their group from those they perceive as being lower in the existing racial hierarchy. Within ethnic networks, co-ethnic exploitation occurs when individuals attempt to move up the socio-economic ladder in a solitary project of racial and socioeconomic uplift. My research contributes an ethnographic analysis of racialized practices of work and ethnic ties in an immigrant-owned Chinese restaurant.

Data and Methods

This study is based on three months of participant-observation in a Chinese restaurant during the summer of 2014 and interviews with 17 workers and owners in 10 different Chinese and Korean restaurants owned by Asian Americans in and around Austin, TX. In particular, I spent a total of over 250 hours working as a cashier at a Chinese restaurant co-owned by a Korean woman and a Taiwanese man. Additionally, after my duration of participant observation I spent extensive amounts of time with two key Korean women informants aged 45 and 43, whom I call Grace and Eunkyung.

During the summer of 2014, I got a job as a cashier at a Chinese restaurant that I call Beijing Restaurant as a point of entry into a field site to learn about processes surrounding immigrant work in Asian restaurants. I typically worked 4 hour lunch shifts on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays, and 4 hour dinner shifts on Saturday nights.

Yelp lists over 100 Chinese restaurants in Austin; thus, I assumed I could easily get a job at one of them, but this proved more difficult than I expected. The first thing managers would ask me was "Can you speak Chinese?" I was turned away from many restaurants. One manager explained that since some of the Chinese cooks couldn't speak English, the servers needed to be able to write or speak Chinese. I inquired at 10 restaurants before getting an interview at Beijing Restaurant. During my interview, I mentioned that I had inquired about a job at other Chinese restaurants, but that no one would hire me because I didn't speak Chinese. One of the owners, a short mid-50 year

old Asian woman, responded, “Well, I don’t speak Chinese, so you’ll be fine.” She was Korean, not Chinese.

As the restaurant’s cashier, I spent time in all areas of the restaurant as I took order tickets to the kitchen, packed to-go orders in the kitchen, and assisted the wait staff with their duties. Before the restaurant opened, my only duty was to clean the areas around the cashier’s desk and count the money in the cash register. After finishing my duties, I talked with servers as I helped them sweep the dining room floor, wipe down dining tables, and fill condiment containers. During restaurant hours, I helped the wait staff with clearing tables. During work hours, I made a mental note of the activities and conversations that went on that day. After my work shift, I recorded daily accounts at Beijing Restaurant, making particular note of significant conversations and events of particular interest. I did not include details of the entire shift since most of my shift consisted of routinized work of answering phone orders and checking out customers.

After I stopped working at Beijing House at the end of the summer, I continued to visit the restaurant and meet with two female Korean immigrant workers, Grace aged 45 and Eunkyung aged 43, outside of the restaurant, traveling with them to Houston and visiting with them our homes. My ability to speak intermediate Korean and my experiences living in Korea for over a year and a half contributed to building rapport with Grace and Eunkyung. My conversations with Grace and Eunkyung over the course of one year gave me insight into the changes in the relationships among Koreans at work, and within their own personal lives.

I also conducted interviews with 13 workers and 4 owners at small Asian restaurants. I recruited participants by going to Chinese and Korean restaurants that were not chain restaurants, talking to managers about my study, and distributing a research subject recruitment flier, which was translated into Korean and Mandarin. I visited over 50 Asian restaurants in and around Austin, often two or three times each to remind managers about my study and see if anyone was interested in participating.

This strategy resulted in most of my 17 interviews; however, recruitment was a challenging process. Most owners and workers were hesitant to get involved with the study. When I approached workers, they directed me to their manager. Most interviews resulted when I was introduced to a worker through the manager or owner of the restaurant. Oftentimes, however, managers were not interested in getting involved with the study either because they were inordinately busy or were weary of revealing information about work practices at their restaurant. Language barriers may have also led to confusion; for example, one Malaysian owner of a Chinese restaurant thought that I was looking to help undocumented workers gain lawful immigration and working status. I also reached out to Asian American organizations in Austin about my study, which resulted in interviews with the owner and one worker at a Vietnamese restaurant.

I conducted a total of 17 interviews with 13 workers and 4 owners at family-owned Korean and Chinese restaurants in Austin (See Appendix 1, which provides a summary of the demographic information obtained from my interview participants). Study participants were not paid, but received a small gift, a small potted plant, as a token of appreciation.

I designed a semi-structured interview guide that asked primarily open-ended questions on topics including immigration, settlement, and occupational experiences. I spoke in English during all of my interviews which lasted between 15 minutes and 2 hours. Three participants responded in Korean, which were translated through the assistance of a native Korean speaker. I audio-recorded most interviews with the exception of interviews with 4 female participants who preferred not to be audio-recorded. In these cases, I did not inquire as to why they were uncomfortable with being audio-recorded. Though, I wrote thorough field notes of conversations. All interviews were transcribed.

I analyzed my field notes and interviews using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. I followed a grounded theory approach to analyze these texts and used coding (Charmaz 2006), where my codes were reflective of the data as close as possible, while also examining the interactions emerging in Beijing House. First I conducted a round of open coding where I tagged data with codes. I grouped codes into categories which were based on similar themes. I tagged field notes and transcripts of interviews with memos noting my theoretical interpretations of the data.

Reflexivity

Working at a Chinese restaurant in Austin allowed me, as a half white, half Japanese, female U.S. citizen raised in a working class family in the South and who can speak intermediate Korean, to gain the trust of many Asian female workers in Asian restaurants. I conducted most interviews and conversations at the workplaces

(restaurants) of my study participants, but did a few at coffee shops, homes of my participants, and at my own home. Participants who were interviewed at their workplaces may have felt less open to speaking honestly or emotionally about their work and lives. While some of my participants talked about issues that were sensitive to them, some of them felt uneasy talking where co-workers might be able to see or hear them. For example, when I asked Kimberly, a 58-year old Vietnamese woman, questions about her family in Vietnam, she started to cry because she missed her sisters who lived there. She may have felt more uncomfortable doing the interview at her workplace.

Sometimes during interviews I sensed a look of pain in the faces of my participants and hesitated to follow up on their statements. For example, when my participants mentioned that they were divorced, I did not inquire further about the process or effects of their divorce. Asking questions about their divorce may have led to a better understanding of my participants' lives; however, being a child of divorced parents, I felt that asking about their divorce may have been intrusive and uncomfortable for my participants.

A few times when it felt appropriate, I brought up my own immigrant mother's experiences in conversation as a way to build rapport with my female participants. Sharing my mother's experiences sometimes led participants to share their own similar feelings and experiences that they may not have otherwise brought up. For example, when Chun, a mid-40 year old Chinese woman, told me that she started working at a Chinese restaurant because she felt socially isolated a home, I told her how my mother also felt socially isolated due to language barriers with her children and in the

community. When I revealed that my mother was often very depressed in this environment, Chun shared that she, too, often felt depressed and elaborated on her feelings.

My age, as a 24-year old female, may have also contributed to building rapport with female participants in their 40's and 50's. Many of them commented on how I was about the same age of their children who were also in college. Thus, as a half Japanese half White woman with personal experience with immigration, I was well-positioned to conduct ethnographic and interview research on socioeconomic in Asian immigrant businesses.

Limitations

This study goes beyond previous research by linking ethnic networks and racial hierarchies, but limitations should be noted. I was not able to conduct interviews with all workers at Beijing House, particularly, Jin, co-owner of Beijing House, and the Latino workers. Jin hardly ever worked at Beijing House's second location where I worked and when she was there, she was so busy I felt it would be burdensome to ask her for an interview during those times. In fact, I was a little nervous to ask for an interview considering what other workers had said about Jin having a high-strung personality. This meant that I was unable to get an important employer and ethnic network hub's perspectives and experiences running a family owned Asian restaurant. However, I was able to interview four employers from other family owned Asian restaurants.

Additionally, interviewing Latino workers was unfortunately not in the scope of my study when I requested IRB permissions. My findings related to Latino workers are based only on observations. Due to this limitation, I was not able to get a full picture of the experiences of workers at Beijing Restaurant. Latino workers at Beijing Restaurant could have potentially faced even more discrimination and surveillance than that that I observed.

My relatively small sample size means that I cannot make any generalizations about Asian immigrants or Asian family-owned restaurants. My findings are therefore limited to how the individuals described their experiences about immigration, ethnic ties, and their work.

Findings

I begin my describing my site of study, a restaurant I call Beijing House and describe experiences of downward mobility and social isolation that lead Asian immigrants to seek work in an Asian restaurant. Then, I address the question (How) does race, ethnicity, and gender shape workers' experiences in family owned restaurants? My analysis of interview and ethnographic data reveal three themes: social capital in ethnic networks, constraints in ethnic networks, and racial inequality in a Chinese restaurant.

Beijing House

Beijing Restaurant was located in a red brick strip mall that also housed a nail salon, a barbershop, and a health care company. It was located in an area with a few cafes and bakeries which were popular brunch spots on the weekends. A neon "Open" sign hung in the window of the restaurant. Driving past it on the road, it wouldn't stand out as a Chinese restaurant. Beijing Restaurant had two dining rooms and a sushi bar. Each of the dining tables were decorated with paintings of scenes of mountains and oceans. Small containers of soy sauce and sweet and sour sauce were set in the middle of each table. Over each table hung a lamp with the Chinese symbol for gold painted on it. A gentle noise of trickling water emanated from a small 3ft x 3ft indoor fountain in the corner of the restaurant.

Jin, the Korean woman who hired me was the co-owner of the Beijing House. She ran it with her business partner Matthew, a Taiwanese man in his 60's. Matthew and Jin opened the restaurant together about 10 years earlier. Jin had prior experience opening

her own restaurant and Matthew had experience working in the kitchens of Chinese restaurants. A couple of years earlier, they were able to build enough revenue to open a second location. Since the second location was newer, Jin spent most of her time managing that restaurant. Sometimes she would come to Beijing House's original location to check in, but I didn't see her more than a few times while I was working at Beijing House. Matthew was seemed to split his time between Beijing House's original location and the second location depending on which location needed more help in the kitchen that day. Matthew couldn't speak much English, but since learning that I was a Ph.D. student, he always greeted me by saying "Hi, smart girl!"

Over the course of three months, I got to know the other workers and the dynamics of Beijing House. Positions at Beijing House were segregated by race and gender. All the white workers – three white men in their early 20's and one 22-year old white woman worked as servers. Chien, a 27-year old Vietnamese man also worked as a server. Only men worked as delivery drivers. Chein, two of the young white male servers, and John who was the son of co-owner Matthew, worked as delivery drivers when they were not serving. Only Asian women worked at the cashier's desk. Grace, the manager and 45-year old Korean woman, and I, half Asian and half White woman, worked as cashiers. All four of the Latino men worked in the kitchen along with the Taiwanese co-owner, Matthew. One 26-year old worker Jose worked at the sushi bar any time there was a sushi order.

Grace was a thin woman who alternated between wearing her children's old Abercrombie and Hollister t-shirts and flowing blouses with dangly earrings and heels.

She usually worked at the cashier's desk alongside of me. My roles included taking phone orders, checking customers out after their meal, and making sure the total sales matched the amount of money in the register. When Grace and I were working together, she often calculated ticket totals and checked customers out. Having only one person deal with the cash register helped us ensure that there were no miscalculations or misunderstandings that might result in the totals being off at the end of the shift. Also, Grace preferred not to answer the phones since she struggled to understand what customers were saying on the phone. When I had time, I helped the servers by cleaning dirty tables and sweeping the floor though it was never my responsibility to do so. During the lunch shift on weekdays, the restaurant was always very busy with professionals and nurses from neighboring offices and hospitals coming in on their lunch breaks. On those days we worked side by side as a team. Both us standing in the small 4ft x 3ft space behind the cashier's counter for an entire shift, we had many opportunities to talk and get to know each other.

Asian Immigrants and Socioeconomic Attainment

Grace was always finding something to clean at the restaurant. When the servers did not sweep, she swept for them. I was surprised that Grace was willing to do extra work while some of the servers slacked off. Grace told me that she would do anything to keep her job. Grace's husband, who worked in South Korea, had gambled away most of their money. Grace had initially moved her family to the United States when her children were young so that they could get their education here. Her husband stayed in South

Korea, and was supposed to send money to support his wife and three children here in the United States. However, he was unable to do so, and Grace had to work. She was grateful that she was able to find a job and worked hard every day so that she wouldn't lose her job. Her husband, on the other hand, was depressed about their economic situation and she said he slept at home all day.

One day at the end of August, I had lunch with Grace after the lunch shift. We sat in a dark and stuffy restaurant because we were required to turn the lights and air conditioning off when the place was closed for business. Grace ate bibimbap, a traditional Korean dish of rice, vegetables, and red pepper paste, improvised out of ingredients from the kitchen and sushi bar. I ate fried rice and a cup of egg drop soup, sides that were remaining from the lunch shift. As she ate, Grace updated me about her personal life:

> My husband is really depressed now, but I can't help him. One day I prayed. God please, I want a divorce. I want a new guy. Or I want to be by myself. I don't need a husband. I don't need that kind of person. I don't want to see his face. One day, I slept in my car. I didn't want to see his face… My age is already 40. What can I do? What can I do? I was just a housewife. Not a career woman. I don't have any experience. I don't have a job. I need money.

Grace was grateful to find people like Kim (the owner of the restaurant), Eunkyung (who worked at Beijing Restaurant's second location), and me through working at Beijing Restaurant. Since, her life at home was strained, she found comfort in some of the friendships she had made through work. Many of the immigrants I

interviewed who worked in Chinese and Korean restaurants in and around Austin immigrated to the United States in pursuit of socioeconomic mobility; however, they, like Grace, faced challenges that meant that they now lead lives much different from what they had expected prior to immigration. Downward mobility, language barriers, and social isolation led immigrant workers to find a means of earning a living and social interaction in immigrant-owned businesses. This may be typical of many new and old immigrants. Zhou (2004) notes that concentrations of co-ethnic immigrant business may create a space and opportunity for co-ethnic immigrants to interact.

For example, the hardest challenge in moving to the United States for Chun, a 45-year old Chinese woman, was the language barrier. Limited English language skills led her to feel isolated, inside and outside her home. Chun had been working at Dragon Kitchen, another Chinese restaurant in Austin, as a server for only two months when I interviewed her. Before then, she was a homemaker. We sat at a table in a corner of the restaurant which was separated from the main dining area. Chun had her long black hair pulled back into a ponytail. She wore glasses on her round and full face. Chun spoke to me in broken English as she quickly ate a plate of Chinese food prepared by the restaurant, her meal after working the lunch shift.

Chun's two children, born and raised in the United States, could speak little Chinese. At home, her children primarily spoke English which made communication between her and her children difficult. Chun felt lonely, bored, and depressed at home. Her social isolation and depression was part of the reason she went to look for work in a Chinese restaurant. She wanted to work in a place where she could talk to people in her

native language. Since Chun wasn't working for the money, but rather for social interaction, she only worked one shift a week on Mondays, the slowest shift in the restaurant industry.

Though work at Chinese and Korean restaurants often brings people of the same ethnicity together, it was still hard work for little compensation. An, a 40 year-old Vietnamese man, worked almost every shift at Mandarin Garden, another Chinese restaurant where I conducted interviews. An met me at 9:15pm, after his shift at a McDonald's in a strip mall where the Mandarin Garden was located. He wore a white button-down shirt with his sleeves rolled up, his work uniform. He had bags under his eyes that made his face look tired. He was frustrated because a few customers came in late which meant that he got off of work late. An said, "All the time, you need to [be] happy with every customer."

An felt that he had to smile and have patience with his customers even when they were impatient with him. As the only server during the week, when the restaurant got busy for lunch, An rushed around the restaurant, greeting customers, taking orders, filling drinks, and delivering dishes, all while displaying a pleasant disposition. He was engaging in a classic form of emotional labor, described as the act displaying a pleasant personality that is not based on genuine feeling (Hochschild 1983).

Yet, An preferred to work alone on the weekdays, so that he could earn more tips that he would not have to share with another worker. An says, "At Asian restaurants, they sell one noodle dish or one fried rice for only $5, $6, or $7. People only put a $1.00 tip. In an Asian restaurant, if you only serve one or two or three tables, you only make $6,

and it's not enough money." In Texas, the minimum wage for servers was $2.13. The American federal government requires a wage of at least $2.13 per hour be paid to employees that receive at least $30 per month in tips. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average annual wage for servers in Texas was $20,620 in 2014 (Waiters and Waitresses 2014). Thus, An needed to earn a significant amount of money in tips in order to support himself. Since the price of a meal at a Chinese restaurant is already so cheap, it would be difficult to earn enough through tips if he worked with another server.

This was also true at Beijing House. Melissa, a white 22-year old female server, called Beijing House "the house of the $2 tip." She had been used to the tips she earned working at a chain family restaurant. On occasion, Vince, a white 25-year old server and delivery driver, would come in to work at Beijing House on days that he wasn't scheduled hoping to earn some extra cash through tips. This caused tension among the servers. Because the servers split all of the tips that were earned, having an extra worker meant less tip money for each person at the end of the shift.

Once when I was making one of my routine visits to Dragonfly Restaurant, a Chinese and Vietnamese restaurant, Jennifer, the 55-year old Vietnamese owner, asked me how much servers were paid at Beijing Restaurant. "Do you start at $3?" "No," I said, shaking my head. Servers were paid $2.15 per hour. "Less than that?" she responded. "My servers start at $3 per hour. And students start at $7.50 per hour since they don't have much experience and they don't make much tips." Jennifer explained to me that she doesn't make a profit from the restaurant. Jennifer used to work for a business consulting company. She often did consulting for restaurants, and after a while she decided to see if

she could run a restaurant herself. Jennifer and her family had other sources of income, investments which created an income for them. They treated the restaurant like an investment, investing in decorations, marketing, *and* their workers, but not as a business for making money. “I don't know how other owners do it” Jennifer said. “I don't know how they make money for themselves if they don't have another source of income.” In a growing city like Austin, there are new restaurants opening up in Austin each year. However, in just a year of fieldwork in and around Austin, I saw two Chinese restaurants close down in the north and south parts of Austin. Thus, in order to maintain cheap and competitive prices and keep their business afloat, some immigrant-owned restaurants may not be able to pay their workers well.

Many of the immigrants I interviewed moved to the United States to give their children better opportunities. Gayoun, a 56-year old Korean woman, suggested that working hard every day in a Korean restaurant was not how she imagined her life in the United States. Gayoun was a short woman with short hair and glasses. Gayoun’s black hair was so thin, I could see her scalp. We sat together at one of the dining tables at local Korean restaurant. Though Gayoun could understand English, she could not speak it well, so when she learned that I could speak some Korean, she responded only in Korean. Gayoun advised other Koreans not to come to the United States for their children’s sake. “Don’t come to America. Just live in Korea. If you come, you will regret it. Was I too frank?” she said. “I would say don’t come. There was the America Dream in the past, but not anymore. Now, Korea became really developed. I say just let kids study in Korea and then send them to university in the United States.”

Other Korean women working in restaurants offered a similar sentiment about immigrating to the United States. Jiyoung was a 56-year old Korean woman who owned Bulgogi Hut, a Korean restaurant in Austin. We sat at one of her dining tables around 3 o'clock in the afternoon and talked as she peeled cloves of garlic from a tub of water. Another Korean woman worker sat beside her. They were taking a break; the restaurant only had a few customers finishing up a late lunch. Jiyoung moved to the United States in 1990 "because [she] wanted the American dream." Twenty-five years later, Jiyoung felt unhappy living in the United States even though she had been successful enough to open Bulgogi Hut with her husband. To supplement her income she worked a second job cleaning offices in addition to managing the restaurant. Only recently, she quit her cleaning job. "I have to work a lot to survive," she said. "I quit a second job after 8 years, because I had to take care of the house. Always work. No time to relax." The other Korean woman nodded in agreement. Both the women's children were in high school. Jiyoung dreamed one day of not working in a restaurant. She wanted to have time to do volunteer work and enjoy her life. Jiyoung offered a word of advice to other immigrants. "Don't come," she said. "There's lots of work. Unless you really need to come. There is no more American Dream. If you're doing okay, then don't come." Jiyoung's expectations of life in the United States were not met. She had not expected to work an additional job on top of managing her own restaurant.

Constraints in Ethnic Networks

After I told Grace about my study on Asian immigrants working in Asian restaurants, she introduced me to her friend Eunkyung. Around 2:00pm, just after our lunch shift, Grace and I locked up Beijing Restaurant and walked across the street to a café where I met Eunkyung and Jisoo, two Korean women who worked at two different Korean restaurants in town. Both women wore light-colored blouses and sandals; it was their day off of work. Jisoo was 49-years old and her child attended high school. Eunkyung was 43-years old and did not have children. Her permed hair fell just below her chin and bangs framed her face. Eunkyung was the niece of Jin, the Korean woman who co-owned Beijing Restaurant. Through Grace's introduction, I was able to learn more about the supports offered in co-ethnic and family networks.

Jin had sponsored Eunkyung and her husband's family reunification visa to move to the United States and employed both of them at Beijing Restaurant. Jin had also given Grace a manager position at Beijing Restaurant, which meant working more shifts and earning more money. Jin functioned as "hub" (Bashi 2007) within her network of Korean friends, workers, and family. She made a special effort to introduce Grace to Eunkyung. They became close friends after their introduction. When Eunkyung started working for the network marketing company Amway, which sold health, beauty, and home care products, she worried she did not have an extensive social network in the United States, and would not be able to make enough money. Jin, however, helped Eunkyung by introducing her to people that she knew, Asian immigrants and others as well. In fact, Jin became Eunkyung's most reliable customer, buying lip glosses and lotions as gifts for her

family and friends. Over time, Eunkyung was able to build ties with other workers in the Korean restaurant industry. Eunkyung would visit them at the restaurants where they worked on days she did not work at the restaurant. Once I joined Eunkyung for lunch at a restaurant where one of her Korean friends worked. Eunkyung called her friend "Nabi unni," meaning "butterfly aunt" because she wore at least ten bejeweled butterfly clips in her hair. Nabi unni brought us a salad on the house before bringing out our lunch. Koreans call free items "service," meaning that the item was part of the customer service experience. They chatted and teased each other like old friends. Commiserating about their lives as women, immigrants, and restaurant servers was an important part of their friendship. In the middle of our lunch, Nabi unni gave Eunkyung some money in exchange for some Amway vitamins she had bought. Eunkyung's ties with other restaurant workers gave her the opportunity to earn money by selling them Amway products.

Through Eunkyung's new social networks, she was also able to help out Grace who did not yet have a large social network in Austin after moving there that summer. At the end of the summer, Grace learned that she could not afford to pay the deposit on her oldest daughter's college tuition. When Eunkyung heard about Grace's troubles, she talked to members of her Korean church and found someone who was willing to give Grace a no-interest loan. Grace would eventually pay back that loan in $20 monthly increments.

Shared ethnicity translated into other material benefits including work schedule flexibility. For example, Jennifer, the owner of Saigon Restaurant, and Kimberly a 58-

year old woman who worked there were both Vietnamese. The owner allowed Kimberly to take off months at a time to travel to Vietnam to visit her family without being fired from her job. Allowing flexibility in her work schedule would ensure that the owner would continue to have a loyal and trusted worker like Kimberly working at Saigon Restaurant. Their shared status as Vietnamese immigrants allowed them to build trust that employers and workers in mainstream economies may not share.

Although ethnic networks could provide social supports and material benefits, tensions arose among those who share the same ethnicity. Workers felt they were being taken advantage of, or were not being treated with respect. Shared language and ethnicity may facilitate social interaction among ethnic group members in an ethnic business, but it may also facilitate social control of co-ethnic workers by their bosses.

As the manager of Beijing House, Grace worked the lunch and dinner shifts Monday through Saturday. This meant that she stayed at Beijing House for about 12 hours a day. Primarily, she worked as a cashier. During the lunch shift on weekdays, the restaurant was always very busy with professionals and nurses from neighboring offices and hospitals coming in on their lunch breaks. On those days we worked side by side as a team. On some days, Grace had been at the restaurant long before we opened. On the morning that the inspector was to come to the restaurant Jin asked Grace to arrive three hours early to clean the restaurant, even though that meant that she would have to stay at the restaurant for 15 hours that day. Jin managed Beijing Restaurant's new second location. Thus, she hardly ever spent much time at the original restaurant. This did not stop Jin from knowing what was going on at the restaurant. Grace complained that Jin

was constantly calling her during and outside of work hours to ask about the restaurant and assign her tasks for the day. Jin called Grace even on Sundays, which was the latter's day off, to work at Beijing Houses's second location. Grace felt like she was constantly on call for Jin. Jin may have offered Grace a manager position, but she extracted long hours out of her. Grace never argued or resisted Jin, because she needed work, and had scarce networks to find a job outside of the ties that she had made at Beijing Restaurant.

Though Jin was hardly ever at Beijing House's original location, the other co-owner, a mid-50 year old Taiwanese man named Matthew, was usually there working in the kitchen. Matthew didn't talk with the workers much, but Grace told me that he watched what was going on in the restaurant and reported back to Jin. We were in the car on the way to lunch at another restaurant when Grace recounted an incident which particularly frustrated her. One day Grace had gotten into a passive aggressive encounter with Matthew. Later, Jin asked Grace if she didn't want to work at Beijing Restaurant anymore. Grace realized that Matthew had told Jin about their tiff. She was very upset and said, "If Jin fires me, I'm going to call a lawyer! I know my rights!" As someone who spoke English well, Grace may have been able to learn about what rights she actually had. For other immigrants with language and other barriers, learning and standing up for their rights may have been very difficult.

Eunkyung, Jin's niece, also felt disrespected working for Jin. The tensions in their relationship originated as far back as Eunkyung's first days in the United States. When Eunkyung moved to the United States, she and her husband rested only two days before starting work at Beijing House. Jin had asked them to help out at the restaurant. Jin

insisted that Eunkyung and her husband stay at her house and use entire second floor. Eunkyung and her husband didn't pay rent, but they paid for the water and utilities and bought their own groceries. It was not until nine months later when Eunkyung and her husband decided to move out of Jin's house that they realized that Jin wasn't paying them a full wage at the restaurant. Eunkyung had simply thought Americans didn't get paid much. Eunkyung learned that Jin had been taking rent out of their salaries. After Eunkyung and her husband moved out, they eventually quit working at Beijing House and found work at another Asian food restaurant. However, when Jin opened Beijing House's second location and asked Eunkyung to help out again (this time for a full wage for waiters – $2.13 per hour), Eunkyung went back to work for her. Soon after, Eunkyung told me she began to feel disrespected again. Jin became more like her boss than her aunt. Eunkyung eventually quit working at Beijing House for a second time in November of the year I met her. It was a dramatic scene at the restaurant. Eunkyung and Jin got into an argument that quickly escalated. Eunkyung had threatened to quit, at which point, Jin yelled back loudly so that all the workers in the restaurant could hear, "Did you hear that? *She* said she wants to quit. *I* didn't fire her. She *wants* to quit." And suddenly Eunkyung was out of a job.

A few months after that incident, Eunkyung and I met for lunch at a Korean restaurant. Luckily, she had been able to find a job at a Korean-owned Japanese restaurant through a Korean friend in the restaurant industry. She described the scene with Jin to me in a tone of anger. Eunkyung strongly recommended that people not immigrate to the United States with a family sponsorship. She said, "If you have an E2

visa [a kind of business visa] because you want to start a restaurant or something that's okay, but don't immigrate for your relatives, because your relationship will break, one hundred percent." Eunkyung was hurt by her broken relationship with her aunt Jin. After all, Jin was the only family she had in the United States aside from her husband. Eunkyung told me that she met with Jin the week before. She had bought some high-quality comfortable restaurant shoes costing over $150. She gave them to Jin and apologized for their fight. They both hugged and cried. Eunkyung's eyes welled up with tears as she told me this part of the story. It seemed to me that Eunkyung was so hurt by Jin and yet, she still needed her aunt, the only family she had in the United States.

Eunkyung's tone changed as she reminded me that Jin worked very hard in the restaurant every day. She almost never took a day off. For example, on the 4th of July that summer, Jin did not close the restaurant's second location where she usually worked. Jin had lived in the United States for over 20 years, yet she had never been on vacation to places like New York or the Grand Canyon. As Eunkyung talked about Jin, she seemed to be trying to reconcile her feelings of anger and restore caring feelings for Jin. As a business woman in a difficult industry, Jin needed to be strategic about running her business. At the same time, Jin was also a Korean immigrant like Eunkyung. When Jin immigrated to the United States, she did not have any Korean family to help her out. She was also a mother, and her work was a large part of why her daughters and grandchildren were able to live comfortably. Hiring family and co-ethnics in family businesses is one way of offering help out co-ethnics; however, unwritten rules of obligation complicated these relationships.

Racial Inequality in a Chinese Restaurant

Eukyung reminisced about her employment at Beijing House. She enjoyed how other "other minorities" (not just Koreans) worked there as well. She compared the diversity at Beijing's second location to the melting pot metaphor used to describe the United States' diverse population. There were Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, White, and Latino workers working at Beijing Restaurant. She compared the diverse working environment to Korea's primarily homogenous racial composition. She felt that the United States' diversity was reflected in its democracy and equality. Eunkyung complained that Korean employers, in the sending country, required applicants to include a picture with their resume and job application. Older and less attractive women were less likely to get a job. Though, Eunkyung talked about democracy and equality in the United States, ethnic diversity did not mean a lack of discrimination.

For example, delivery drivers were able to make the most money at the restaurant on an hourly wage. While servers made $2.15 an hour, delivery drivers made $7.25, along with $3 delivery fee, and usually a tip from customers. It seems glaringly unequal that women did not work as delivery drivers since they could make the most money. When I asked Eunkyung why she never worked as delivery driver even though they had the most earning potential, she said she hadn't even considered it before. But she added that she was not a good driver. In Korea, she was an amazing driver, but that changed with immigration. Moreover, she said that she was bad at finding addresses. Finally, since there was no lack for workers wanting to work as delivery drivers at Beijing House, Eunkyung probably could not change positions very easily.

Aside from Matthew, all of the cooks were Latino. None of the Latino workers spoke English well, and communicated with other workers through a mix of broken Spanish and English. One day at Beijing House, the white workers were joking about how Jin didn't trust any of the workers at the restaurant, but she particularly didn't trust the Latino workers. When I inquired further, Ben, a white male server and delivery driver who had worked at Beijing House for about 2 years, noted that there were four cameras in the restaurant: two in the kitchen, one in front of the cash register, and one in the large dining room.

I later learned that surveillance in the restaurant was not limited to cameras. The cooking staff was locked in the kitchen on days that Matthew was not working in the kitchen and monitor the kitchen staff. Whenever one of the cooks wanted to take a break outside, they had to ask Grace for the key to the kitchen door that led outside. Jin kept the door leading outside of the kitchen locked so that the Latino workers wouldn't steal any food from the kitchen.

From 2:30pm to 4:30pm, when the restaurant closed between lunch and dinner, the restaurant entire restaurant was locked. Workers could leave the restaurant during the break and come back for the dinner shift if they were working that shift. However, the Latino workers usually stayed at the restaurant during the break. Most of the Latino workers carpooled to the restaurant in one car and didn't live close enough to the restaurant to go home on their break. Two hours was perfect for a nap to rest up for the dinner shift. Also, despite Austin's summer heat, Grace was required by Jin to turn off the air conditioner during the break between shifts. In order to ensure that nothing left the

restaurant during these two hours, Jin also required that the entrance to the restaurant also be locked, meaning that the Latino workers who stayed at the restaurant during the break were locked inside a building without air conditioning. I learned that the Latino workers could not open the doors from the inside. The Latino kitchen staff were locked in the kitchen during their work shift and locked in the restaurant during their break, meaning that they were locked in from 10am to 10pm every day.

I knew that at least one of the Latino cook staff was undocumented. I learned this when Mario, one of the Latino cook staff came to the cashier's desk one night after an evening shift and asked for his money. I did not understand why he was asking for money until John, Matthew's son, came to the cash register, took out some money and gave it to Mario. John explain that Mario got paid in cash by either John, Matthew's son or Jin. Latino and Asian workers at Beijing Restaurant's second location may have hired undocumented workers as well.

Hiring Asian workers at an Asian restaurant made the restaurant seem authentic. For example, when I told John, that I had recently moved into a neighborhood where a lot of Chinese graduate students and visiting professors lived, he said "If any of them need a job, send them our way." It didn't matter that they didn't have a work permit. It seemed to me that Asian immigrants were cheap labor that brought a sense of authenticity to the restaurant. Thus, hiring Asian minorities for the front of house and exploitable Latino workers for the back of house was a lucrative business practice. Other restaurants in Austin also hired undocumented workers. In an interview with a Malaysian man who

owned a Chinese restaurant, he noted that he hired undocumented Latinos to work in the kitchen. Bosung, was an undocumented worker in a Korean restaurant.

Discrimination and prejudice at Beijing House was racial *and* ethnic. Among Asian Americans, there was also prejudices that produced ethnic hierarchies. Grace was visiting my apartment during a break one day after the lunch shift, just chatting about Beijing House and other aspects of work when conversation led to race and ethnicity. She was wearing a black t-shirt, the Beijing House uniform and she had changed out of her work shoes into flip flops. She sat on my tan futon couch, sipping some water. Grace outlined an ethnic hierarchy of Asian American ethnicities that were represented at Beijing House. She started with Koreans. Koreans certainly had their flaws, but were at the top of the hierarchy. They were clean, smart, respectful people. Next were the Chinese and Taiwanese. Chinese were good people, but she thought that they were dirty. She explained that since her husband and his family was Chinese, she knew this from experience. Grace suggested that Matthew and John, who were both Taiwanese, were probably not very clean or organized. At the bottom of this hierarchy were the Vietnamese who, she explained, were dirty, lazy, and stupid. Grace thought that these characteristics were representative of Chien, the 27-year old Vietnamese server and delivery driver at Beijing Restaurant. Chien had been working at Beijing House for about four years. He immigrated to the United States when he was 17-years old and started working at Vietnamese restaurant just a couple of days after arriving in the U.S. After several years of working at a restaurant, Chien started attending community college in hopes of eventually going to nursing school. Compared to Grace's children who were in

college at public universities in California, Chien's lifestyle and work ethic, according to Grace, was not up to par.

Discussion

Many immigrants across the United States, who are already largely marginalized, face vulnerabilities and exploitation in their ethnic networks and ethnic workplaces. The strong connection between Asian immigrant and the "model minority" means that inequalities in Asian family-owned restaurants, in particular, often go unexamined. My study reveals inequalities in family owned Asian immigrant businesses – exploitation by co-ethnic employers and astonishingly bad working conditions for socially disadvantaged workers such as Latinos workers. In this study, I set out to investigate experiences of workers in family-owned Asian restaurants.

My first major finding is that some Asian immigrant workers in Asian immigrant restaurants found meaning in their work, despite low wages. Many Asian immigrant workers found sociality with other co-ethnics who shared an understanding of their culture or background as an Asian immigrant. My second major finding is that ethnic ties can become a source of support as well as a source of obligation that can lead to social control. At Beijing Restaurant, workers were able to gain assistance with immigration, employment, and acquire loans from Jin and other co-ethnic workers. However, network hubs, like Jin, may have felt obligated to help other Korean immigrants by hiring them or offering other forms of assistance. In turn, she may have felt entitled to taking advantage of her Korean workers. Particularly, immigrants may form a sense of indebtedness to co-ethnics who offered immigration assistance through family reunification visas. From Bashi's (2007) perspective, social capital in ethnic networks may turn into a source for

social tension. Cultures of reciprocity and obligation may be highlighted in immigrant communities where individuals and groups look for resources in informal ways because of their social disadvantage. My findings bring up questions about how family reunification visas, which are generally perceived as benefiting immigrants, may actually facilitate exploitation of immigrants. Future research should determine pathways of assistance and reciprocity in ethnic and immigrant networks, particularly among those who immigrated via family reunification visas.

My final major finding is that despite the fact that both employer and most workers at Beijing House share the experience of being an immigrant, employers discriminated against immigrant workers to varying degrees depending on race and ethnicity. These ethnic-racial hierarchies persisted in Beijing House despite the fact the owners and most of the workers shared the challenges of being an immigrant. Latino immigrant workers faced the most deplorable working conditions and extreme measures of surveillance. From Treitler's (2013) perspective, both owners and workers in family-owned Asian restaurants are constrained by local racial-ethnic hierarchies at large. According to Treitler (2013), the success of one racial-ethnic group is predicated on their ability to benefit from existing racial hierarchies initially designed to exclude other racial-ethnic groups from socioeconomic opportunities that whites have. Treilter (2013) implies that racial-ethnic hierarchies are maintained by racial-ethnic minorities, within ethnic groups *and* by individual persons of color.

Korean co-ethnics at Beijing House may provide support to each other in a project of "ethnic uplift" to gain socioeconomic mobility while differentiating their group

from those lower on the ethnic-racial hierarchy, in particular, Latino immigrants. Korean co-ethnics and other Asians at Beijing House differentiate from supposed racial-ethnic inferiors through self-segregation in the workplace, a strategy of racial-ethnic differentiation noted by Treitler (2013). Additionally, within ethnic networks, co-ethnic exploitation may occur when individuals attempt to move up the socio-economic ladder in a solitary project of racial and socioeconomic uplift. For example, Korean co-ethnics may exploit each other in their efforts to gain social mobility.

Conclusion

Immigrants across the United States face exploitation and deplorable working conditions at their places of work (Rosales 2014, Anthias 2007, Avenarius 2012, Cranford 2005, Ryan 2011,). I add to the ongoing conversation about ethnic networks and immigrant workplaces (Hoang 2015, Treitler 2013, Song 1997, Lancee 2012, Levitt 2002, Raijman & Tienda 2003, Valdez 2008, Light, et al. 1994) by showing how ethnic workplaces can be source of social tension, exploitation, and racial-ethnic oppression. My study presents evidence that inequality exists in family owned businesses, even those where both employer and workers are immigrants. Shared identity as immigrants does not prevent immigrant employers from exploiting co-ethnic and discriminating against other immigrant racial-ethnic minorities in order to ensure that their business will succeed.

Richard Jenkins (1997) suggests that identifications of 'ethnicity' are typically rooted in group identification rather than categorization and identifications of 'race' are typically rooted in categorization; however, he notes that while ethnicity is not necessarily hierarchical, it can become hierarchically organized. My research shows how ethnicity can be hierarchically organized in employment positions at a Chinese restaurant. My research offers evidence to support Andreas Wimmer's (2013) argument that high levels of inequality can lead to social closure among groups of individuals who may or may not share ethnicity. In order to defend their resources, dominant actors will draw boundaries against outsiders. Additionally, my research supports Bashi's (2007)

perspective that ethnic ties can become a source of obligation that can lead to social control.

Finally, I add to the work of Treitler (2013) by demonstrating through my study that the success of one racial-ethnic group, Koreans, is predicated on their ability to benefit from existing racial hierarchies. Alongside Treilter, I show that racial-ethnic hierarchies are maintained by racial-ethnic minorities, within ethnic groups *and* by individual persons of color.

Continued research on ethnic networks and ethnic workplaces is urgent for understanding mechanisms of inequality for a rapidly increasing immigrant population. Asian small business owners are often thought of as the epitome of the American Dream, but those dreams may be based on some nightmares for others.

Appendix A

Sample Characteristics

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Position	Type of Restaurant
Eunkyung	Korean	Female	45	Manager	Chinese (Beijing House)
Grace	Korean	Female	43	Server	Chinese (Beijing House)
Gayoun	Korean	Female	45	Server	Korean
Minjoung	Korean	Female	47	Server	Korean
Suyeon	Korean	Female	48	Server	Korean
Bosung	Korean	Male	29	Server	Korean
Kimberly	Vietnamese	Female	58	Server	Chinese/Vietnamese
An	Vietnamese	Male	40	Server	Chinese/Vietnamese
Vu	Vietnamese	Male	22	Server	Chinese/Vietnamese
Chien	Vietnamese	male	27	Server	Chinese (Beijing House)
Chun	Chinese	Female	45	Server	Chinese
Ling	Chinese	Female	46	Server	Chinese
Victoria	Korean	female	26	Manager	Korean
Jiyoung	Korean	Female	47	Owner	Korean
Minji	Korean	female	46	Owner	Korean
Heemin	Korean	Male	56	Owner	Korean
David	Malaysian	Male	64	Owner	Chinese

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